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A LEGEND OF FLORENCE.

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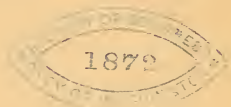
A

LEGEND OF FLORENCE.

A Play.

IN FIVE ACTS.

James Henry
BY LEIGH HUNT.



One step to the death-bed,
And one to the bier,
And one to the charnel,
And one—oh where?—SHELLEY.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON :
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TO

ARMORER DONKIN, ESQ.,

OF NEWCASTLE,

WITHOUT the aid of whose practical wisdom, in combination with his kind heart, the Author might never have had health or leisure enough to indulge himself in an effort of this kind, the following PLAY is inscribed by his

Obliged and affectionate Servant,

LEIGH HUNT.

CHELSEA, FEB. 6, 1840.

PREFACE.

As it is now the custom to publish new plays on the day of their performance, I am unable to state here what will have been the success or otherwise of the present, as far as regards the stage. But I cannot help taking the first opportunity of saying, how delightful has been the intercourse it has occasioned me with my new friends the performers, from the moment when the fair manager first held out to me her cordial hand, down to the last pleasant interchange of jest and earnest during the business of rehearsal. In all my life I never met with a reception, on all sides, so full of what is most precious to an anxious author,—willingness to hear, promptitude to decide, an absence of every species of insincerity and mystification, and, what has particularly touched me, a generous encouragement to proceed in my new efforts, even should the first have tried the philosophy of every party concerned, by proving unsuccessful. When authors are treated in this manner behind the curtain, and the public see what is done to

please them by indefatigable attentions to every propriety of the stage, no wonder a sense of cheerfulness and abundance is associated with the idea of Covent Garden Theatre in the general mind, and that Madame Vestris, night after night, has seen her larger house fill as the smaller did, in spite of those who had begun to think large houses impracticable, and of the hostility even of that late pertinacious anti-playgoer, the bad weather.

If I omit specifying by name every one among the representatives of my *dramatis personæ* who have shown a willingness to befriend me (which indeed includes the whole list), they will attribute it partly to a disinclination to make my thanks appear mechanical and a matter of course. They will not grudge, however, the particular acknowledgments I feel bound to express towards the Stage-manager, Mr. Bartley, for a co-operation no less judicious than warm; and to Miss Ellen Tree, for entering into the character of the heroine with a sensibility of brain and heart which left me nothing to desire, except that no failure, occasioned by the authorship of the play, might ill reward it. Should I have been destined to undergo that new trial of old habits of endurance, it may be permitted my self-love, by way of consolation, not easily to forget the bright countenance which I saw standing beside me, in a glow of tears and exaltation, at the end of one of the perusals of the piece,—the climax, indeed, of the like kindly sympathies

from others of my genial friends behind the curtain. One of the agreeable surprises I met with upon making my first acquaintance with this part of the theatre (for I was never in a green-room before), was this freshness of imagination, and strong propensity to the enjoyment as well as business of the stage, which I had idly fancied to be not common to the profession. I had concluded, with a haste which the pleasures of my own studies should have warned me against, that when the business of a scene was over, they retired to their green-rooms to rest from their fatigues and be silent, or to talk of anything else; but I found them occupied in nothing so certain, unless it was the general playfulness of their animal spirits,—the natural wine, indeed, which is necessary to make an actor's blood what it is, and which manifests itself in a flow of companionship equally liberal and decorous. Such at least I have found the theatrical world, as it exists under the unaffected and generous government of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews.

A word respecting the story of my play.—When I resided near Florence, some years ago, I was in the habit of going through a street in that city, called the “Street of Death,” (*Via della Morte*),—a name given it from the circumstance of a lady's having passed through it at night-time in her grave-clothes, who had been buried during a trance. The story, which in its mortal particulars resembles several of the like sort that are popular in other countries, and which,

indeed, are no less probable than romantic, has been variously told by Italian authors; and I have taken my own liberties with it accordingly. But nobody, I believe, in Italy ever doubted the main facts. The names of the parties most concerned are those of real families, and handed down as belonging to the actual persons; and their characters (if my remembrance of the account given in a Florentine publication does not deceive me*) correspond in their elements with those here attempted to be drawn out. Among the pleasures which I have had in making the endeavour, (for ultimate success, or otherwise, has no more to do with those, than the uses to which a tree may be turned, affect it while growing,) is the melancholy one of thinking, that the beloved friend whom I lost in that country had chosen the same subject for a poem, of which he has left a fragment. The motto from it in my title-page has enabled me to see our names together once more, and upon an occasion which even his noble dramatic genius would have taken to welcome me for love's sake, if for no reason more worthy of the companionship.

May I add, without appearance of presumption of another sort, that the versification of this play, in passages where the natural quickness and freedom of dialogue seemed to warrant it, is of a less apparent regularity than the drama has been accustomed to for a long time? I am aware, (and

* The "Osservatore Fiorentino."

I say it with deepest reverence, and with a deprecation of immodesty even in thinking it necessary so to say it,) that the dramatist, high above all dramatists, has almost sanctified a ten-syllable regularity of structure, scarcely ever varied by a syllable, though rich with every other diversity of modulation. But noble as the music is which he has accordingly left us, massy, yet easy, and never failing him, any more than his superhuman abundance of thought and imagery,—I dare venture to think, that had he lived farther off from the times of the princely monotony of “Marlowe’s mighty line,” he would have carried still farther that rhythmical freedom, *of which he was the first to set his own fashion*, and have anticipated, and far surpassed, the sprightly licence of Beaumont and Fletcher. All I can say in excuse for my own departure from a custom so ennobled, is, that it suits, as well as I can make it, the amount of power I possess to indulge an impulse which I hold to be proper to dramatic verse, as distinguished from that of narration. But I beg the reader to give me credit for rating the utmost possible success of such a theory no higher than it deserves, when brought into comparison with that “all in all” of passion and imagination, of which it is only the least and lightest of servants.

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

HAD the public reception of this play been different from what it was, it would still have been my duty, as well as pleasure, to thank the management, and all parties concerned, for the way in which it was put upon the stage, and performed. But delightful indeed has the acknowledgment been rendered by good fortune. Most kind have been my old readers to me; for surely the audience on the first night must have been half made up of them, to be so willing to be pleased. Most kind also has been the press, of all parties,—doubtless moved by a like readiness to think the best of a not ill-natured writer; and especially am I bound to value this general spirit of good-will, and above all, the loud and instantaneous sympathy of the audience with the poetical justice of the catastrophe, when I consider how the treatment of domestic tyranny appears to have puzzled the ethics of some of my literary brethren; and how questions, which had been accustomed to beg all the delicacies on one side, suddenly and provokingly beheld

the possibility of at least an equality of claim shifted to the other. Most heartily do I thank the many who have done me the honour to agree with me, and the few who have kindly differed.

But gratitude is a poverty-stricken, though a delighted thing. It opens its hands, and says, "What have I to bestow?"—I wish I could shower upon Miss Ellen Tree pearls and gems, equal to the syllables that she so richly utters, with those bright eyes, and those lips which seem made delightedly to say "Yes." How touching, when in the character of the unhappy wife, they are forced to show themselves equal mistresses of sorrow! I will venture to prophesy, that her delivery of passages in this character, like those of the Cibbers and Barrys of old, will be recorded in annals of the stage, though the written part, as a whole, should not survive its author. To Mr. Bartley, who looks to admiration one of those solid yet festive poets of the town class, who flourished in the times, and at the table, of "that good fellow of a Pope, Leo the 'Tenth," I am indebted for that hearty and emphatic delivery of every word, which happened to be of more importance than it might seem to a right understanding of much of the spirit of the play. What there is of heaviness at present in Mr. Anderson's style is an ore containing gold; and will wear off, as the passion in him, of which he has a great deal, learns to run into a state of fusion, and to overcome intellectual-looking temptations

to isolated bits of description and illustration. He is the man of all others living, whom I should have desired for the part of my lover, had I not had the good fortune to have him in it. He is young, in earnest, has no tricks, and can be absorbed in another. His burst of feeling, when he finds *Ginevra* alive, which brought down echoes of thunder from the house, was as if his whole repressed heart had cried out for the first time, and gone mad with delight. And fortunate I was also in obtaining, for the part of *Agolanti*, the assistance of a gentleman like Mr. Moore, one of the modestest and most zealous men (to judge from a short acquaintance) that I ever met with, and whose sole object is to identify himself with the character he has to represent. He too, like Mr. Anderson, occasionally wants an absorption of the less into the greater; or to express what I mean more distinctly, the power of painting incidental images and feelings as he goes, without seeming to stop to paint them. But like him also, he has no cant, no self-absorption, and, on the other hand, a faith in passion, which is capable of every acquirable excellence by study. If he failed in *Hamlet* (and who ever did justice to that epitome of the faculties of man, of all the celebrated actors of the last forty years, including Kean himself?) I ventured to affirm, that he would have the majority of the public with him in a part like that of *Agolanti*; and I rejoice for his sake, as well as my own, that the anticipation has been confirmed. Mr. Vandenhoff I had not the pleasure of seeing on the boards,

till he personated the *Captain* of the Pope's Guards. He is younger than Mr. Moore, and even, I believe, than Mr. Anderson; and his style works somewhat crudely at present, but not without indications, if I mistake not, of something very relishing, as well as ripe, by-and-by. He is sensitive, intelligent, graceful in feeling, as well as in face and person; and, like the rest of the performers in this well-met company, is in earnest, and desires to know all that can do him and his author good. It is a very interesting generation, this of the stage, to those who are desirous of what everybody else desires, when the speculation is to be turned upon themselves,—namely, that of seeing what is good in them. The older ones, with few exceptions, appear to be as young in animal spirits as the youngest; and the youngest, instead of being nothing but “gay fellows about town,” tend as strongly to the domestic affections as the oldest, and are husbands and fathers of families. One of them brings the secret of his tenderness, as the stage lover, from the bosom of his own household; and another, whom in his love of philology and his Latin quotations you took for a young gentleman not long arrived from college, tells you that he read your play to his wife, the other night, before he went to bed.—But, indeed, all the stirring work of life must be performed by earnest natures, whether off the stage or upon it.

I beg Mrs. Walter Lacy to accept my thanks for consenting to perform in so small a part as that of the Page. It was difficult, it seems, with one obvious exception (which other difficulties stood in the way of),—and a second, I

conclude, owing to a non-habit of performing in such characters,—to find a lady for the part, who united the triple requisites of song, speech, and a demonstrable pretty leg. The leg, no doubt, was common: but not so the combination with it of the two other virtues; and Mrs. Lacy was accordingly induced to take pity on us. Miss Lee's pleasant little gentle nature did not despise the part of *Fiordilisa*; and this reminds me of the obligation I owe to Mr. Payne, the admirable pantomimist, for saving me the peril of entrusting the words of a servant to be spoken by an unknowing mouth,—a hazard which has often given the first cue to the “inextinguishable laughter” of a damnation! Miss Charles uttered what little she had to say to the provoking bad husband, with all the effective pungency of an *Estifania*: and if part of the dirge naturally divided the attention of the audience with the other few words delivered by Mrs. Brougham, the loss must have been made up to her in that beautiful costume and head-dress, which so became her handsome countenance. The whole play, indeed, thanks to the rapid elegance of the hands of Messrs. Grieve, and the pleasant learning, in point of costume, of the new friend I have had the happiness of making—Mr. Planché—(the most misunderstood of influential men in a theatre, by those who think he is not one of the most congenial of authors,) may be said to have been, throughout, painted Italian,—the scenery delighting the spectators with its southern elegance, and the *dramatis personæ* looking as if they had walked out

of the frames of Raphael and Titian. No wonder, when the taste and vivacity of a southern nature presides over the management, seconded by a congenial knowledge. It has been objected to Mr. Bishop's charming melody for the song of "Hope," that it is hardly southern enough, though, perhaps, of too great a vivacity; but, for my own part, I receive so constant a pleasure from it, as it haunts my ear, that I can find in it nothing but to like. As to the more solemn and affecting strains of instrumental and vocal music, kindly furnished to two of my scenes, by my dear friends Vincent Novello and Egerton Webbe, the tears of the audience have stopped the words of the author.

One word more in all reverence,—perhaps I should rather say reverential fear,—respecting the versification of Shakespeare. What I have ventured to say about it in the first Preface, and which my generous critics will greatly oblige me when they controvert, by not ceasing to bear in mind the reverence with which I have done it, it will become me by and by, should others not anticipate the intention, to enlarge upon, as well as I may be able, in some remarks upon versification in general, and English versification in particular,—subjects which have long required discussion, and which in the hands of scholars who surpass me in a knowledge of languages and music, would be found amply to repay it.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

FRANCESCO AGOLANTI, a noble Florentine	. Mr. Moore.
ANTONIO RONDINELLI, another	. . . Mr. Anderson.
FULVIO DA RIVA, a Poet	. . . Mr. Bartley.
CESARE COLONNA, an Officer of the Pope's Guards	Mr. G. Vandenhoeff.
GIULIO, a Page	. . . Mrs Walter Lacy.
SERVANT	. . . Mr. Payne.
GINEVRA, Wife to Agolanti	. . . Miss Ellen Tree.
OLIMPIA, friend of Ginevra	. . . Miss Charles.
DIANA, another	. . . Mrs. Brougham.
FIORDILISA, Ginevra's handmaiden	. . . Miss Lee.

SCENE—*Florence and its Neighbourhood.*

TIME—*During the Pontificate of Leo the Tenth.*

A

LEGEND OF FLORENCE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

The High-road from Florence to Rome.

Enter DA RIVA and COLONNA, meeting.

Colonna. Fulvio, immortal boy—poet—good fellow —
Punctual moreover, which is wonder's climax,—
How dost ? and where hast been these eighteen months ?
At grass, eh ? fattening with thy Pegasus,
Like the most holy father !

Da Riva. Dearest Cesare,
'Tis you, methinks, are the immortal boy,
Growing nor fat nor thin, but still the same ;
Still the same bantering, glittering, blithe, good soul,
Pretending to give blows, to excuse thy blessings.

Colonna. Nay, but the poet is the youth for ever,
Howe'er he grow ; let him feign even a bit
Of a white top, like our old roaring boys,

B

Ætna and Vesuvius, with their sides of wine.
You know, Da Riva, for those hairs of thine
I ought to call thee father, if I could ;
But then thine heart, and this warm hand to match,
Will never let me think thee, somehow or other,
A dozen years older than myself.

Da Riva. Years older !

A pretty jest, 'faith, when our souls were twins,
And thou but the more light one, like an almond
Pack'd in one shell behind a plumper. Well,
How dost ? and how does Florio and Filippo ?
And is the Pope really and truly come
At last, and in his own most sacred person,
To see and glorify his native place ?
Or hast thou shot before him, like a ray
Out of his orb ?

Colonna. Thy simile has it, 'faith :
Here is his ray, shining upon thyself,
As his ray should ; and the good orb meanwhile,
Growing a little stout or so, reposes
Some nine miles off, and will be here next week,
Just by the time your speeches are all ready.

Da Riva. And toilets ?

Colonna. Ay, and your extempore odes.
Well, well ; you see we are insolent as ever,
All well and merry.—Not so, eh ? in Florence ?
How is Antonio ? and pray, who was he,

That fellow yonder—there he goes—that left you
Just as I came, and went off bowing so,
With such a lavish courtesy and close eye?

Da Riva. That lavish courtesy and that close eye
Will tell you how Antonio is. That fellow,
As you call him, is one of the most respectable men
In Florence. “Men,” do I say? one of the richest
And proudest nobles; of strict fame withal,
Yet courteous; bows to every one, pays every one——

Colonna. Oh villain!

Da Riva. Flatters every one; in short,
Is as celestial out of his own house,
As he is devil within it. (*Whispering in his ear*) Ginevra’s
husband.

Colonna. The devil it is! (*Looking after him*) Methinks
he casts a blackness
Around him as he walks, and blights the vineyards.
And all is true then, is it, which they tell me?
What, quite? Has he no plea? no provocation
From lover, or from wife?

Da Riva. None that I know of,
Except her patience and the lover’s merit.
Antonio’s love, you know, is old as his,
Has been more tried, and, I believe, is spotless.

Colonna. Dear Rondinelli!—Well, but has this husband
No taste of good in him at all? no corner
In his heart, for some small household grace to sneak in?

Da Riva. Nay, what he has of grace in him is not sneaking.
In all, except a heart, and a black shade
Of superstition, he is man enough !
Has a bold blood, large brain, and liberal hand,
As far as the purse goes ; albeit he likes
The going to be blown abroad with trumpets.
Nay, I won't swear he does not love his wife,
As well as a man of no sort of affection
Nor any domestic tenderness, can do so.

Colonna. A mighty attaching gentleman, 'ifaith,
And quite uxorious.

Da Riva. Why, thus it is.
He highly approves her virtues, talents, beauty ;
Thinks her the sweetest woman in all Florence,
Partly, because she is,—partly, because
She is his own, and glorifies his choice ;
And therefore he does her the honour of making her
The representative and epitome
Of all he values,—public reputation,
Private obedience, delighted fondness,
Grateful return for his unamiableness,
Love without bounds, in short, for his self-love :—
And as she finds it difficult, poor soul,
To pay such reasonable demands at sight,
With the whole treasure of her heart and smiles,
The gentleman takes pity on—himself !
Looks on himself as the most unresponded to

And unaccountably ill-used bad temper
In Tuscany ; rages at every word
And look she gives another ; and fills the house
With miseries, which, because they ease himself,
And his vile spleen, he thinks her bound to suffer ;
And then finds malice in her very suffering !

Colonna. And she, they tell me, suffers dangerously ?

Da Riva. 'Tis thought she'll die of it. And yet, observe
now :—

Such is poor human nature, at least such
Is poor human inhuman nature, in this man,
That if she were to die, I verily think
He'd weep, and sit at the receipt of pity,
And call upon the gods, and think he loved her !

Colonna. Poor, dear, damn'd tyrant !—and where goes
he now ?

Da Riva. To Florence, from his country-house ; betwixt
Which place and town, what with his jealousy
Of the sweet soul, and love of mighty men,
He'll lead a devil of a life this fortnight ;
Not knowing whether to let her share the holiday
For fear of them, and of Antonio ;
Or whether, for worse fear, still of Antonio,
To keep her in the shades, love's natural haunt.

Colonna. The town's the hiding-place. Be sure he'll take
Some musty lodging in the thick of the town,
To hide her in : perhaps within the sound
Of the shows, to vex her ; and let her see what pleasures

She loses in not loving him.—Well, here am I,
A feather in the cap of the fair advent
Of his most pleasant Holiness Pope Leo,
Come to make holiday with my Tuscan friends,
And lay our loving heads together, to see
What can be done to help this gentle lady
For poor Antonio's sake, and for her own.

Da Riva. Ay, and amidst those loving heads, are lovely
ones.

What think you of the bright Olimpia,
And sweet Diana, her more thoughtful friend?—
You recollect them?

Colonna. What! the divine widows,
That led that bevy of young married dames
At the baths of Pisa, and whom we used to call
Sunlight and Moonlight?

Da Riva. The identical stars!
She of the crescent has a country-house,
Here in the neighbourhood, close by Agolanti's.
There are they both; and there Antonio is,
Waiting us two; and thence his friends the ladies,
Escorted by us two, will go to visit
Their friend Ginevra; partly, if they can,
To bring him better news of his saint's health;
Partly, for other reasons which you'll see.

Colonna. Charming! And wherefore stand you looking
then,
This way and that?

Da Riva. Why, *this* way is our road ;
And that way I was looking, to see how far
Our friend, the foe, was on his way to town.
I have never, you must know, been in his house ;
And little thought he, when he saw us here,
What unexpected introduction, eh ?
Was waiting us. I can't help thinking, somehow,
He'll hear of it, and come back.

Colonna. For Heaven's sake, haste then.
What ! loitering !—May the *husband* take the hindmost !

SCENE II.

A Room in the Villa Agolanti.

Enter GIULIO and FIORDILISA, meeting.

Fiordilisa. Alas ! my lady is very angry, Giulio !

Giulio. Angry ? At what ?

Fiordilisa. At Signor Antonio's letter.

Oh, she says dreadful things. She says you and I
Will kill her ; that we make her, or would make her,
Tell falsehoods to her husband, or bring down
His justice on our heads ; and she forbids me,
However innocent you may call, or think it,

Bring letters any more. She bade me give it you
Back again—see—unopened.

Giulio.

'Tis a pity

That, too.

Fiordilisa. Why, Giulio?

Giulio.

Oh, Signor Antonio

Read it me ;—ay, he did—he's such a gentleman.

He said,—“ See, Giulio, I would not have you wrong

Your mistress in a thought ; nor give you an office

Might do yourself the thought of wrong, or harm.”

You know I told you what he wrote outside—

You recollect it—there it is—“ Most harmless,—

I dare to add, most virtuous ;” and there's more

Besides here, underneath. Did she read that ?

Fiordilisa. I know not. She read very quickly, at any rate ;

Then held it off, as tho' it frighten'd her,

And gave it back. And she look'd angry too ;

At least, she did not look as she is used,

But turn'd right so, and waived me to be gone.—

I cannot bear to do the thing she likes not.

Giulio. Nor I.

Fiordilisa. Well—so I think. But hush—hush—hush !

a step !

[*Runs to the window.*

And coming quickly !—'Tis the Signor—'Tis !

So soon come back too !—Strike up the guitar—

Strike up that song of Hope, my lady loves—

Quickly now—There's a good little Giulio.

[*Exit.*

Giulio. Little ! well,—come, for such an immense young
gentlewoman

That's pretty well ! She has fallen in love, I fear,
With some tall elderly person.—But the song.

Giulio. (*Sings.*)

Hope, thou pretty child of heaven ! I prythee, Hope, abide—
I will not ask too much of thee—by my suffering side.
Grief is good for humbleness, and earth is fair to see ;
And if I do my duty, Hope, I think thou'lt stay with me.

Enter AGOLANTI.

Agolanti. What frivolous ante-chamber tinkling now
Attunes the pulse to levity ? puts folly
In mind of vice, as tho' the hint were needed ?
(*Listening.*) The door shuts, now the song's done. What
was it ?

What sang'st thou, boy ?

Giulio. A song of Hope, sir.

Agolanti.

Hope !

What hope !

Giulio. I will repeat it, sir, so please you ?

The words, not music.

[*He repeats the words.*]

'Tis a song my lady

Is fond of.

Agolanti. When she's troubled most ? with sickness ?

Giulio. No, sir, I think when she's most cheerful.

Agolanti.

That

Paper within thy vest—Is that the words ?

Give it me.

Giulio. Nay, sir, it is none of mine.

Agolanti. Give it me, boy.

Giulio. I may not, sir.—I will not.

Agolanti. Play not the lion's cub with me. That letter
Was given thee by Antonio Rondinelli.
He, and the profane wit, Fulvio da Riva,
Were seen this morning by the Baptistery,
Talking with thee. Give it me; or myself
Will take the answer to Antonio's house
In bloody characters.

Giulio (aside). 'Tis a most sacred letter,
And ought to fell him, like a cuff o' the conscience.
Farewell, my place! Farewell, my lady sweet!
Giulio is gone.—There is the letter, sir;
Take it, *(aside)* and be a devil choked with scripture.

Agolanti. Unopen'd! come—thou meanest me well,
Giulio?

Ah!—but—why didst thou loiter in thy message?
How came it that this fair epistle kiss'd not
The lady's fairer hands? for that's the style.

Giulio. It did, sir.

Agolanti. Did!

Giulio. Yes, sir. My lady had it.
(Aside) How like you that? You have not read the whole
On the outside. *(Aside)* His very joy torments him.

Agolanti. She read it not, like the good lady she is;
But yet you gave it her.

Giulio.

He read it me :

He did,—the noble Antonio read it me,
To save my youth, every way, from harm.

Agolanti (aside). Some vile double signification, addressed

To ripper brains, must have secured the words.
The foresight was too gross, if not a coward's !
There has been, after all, I needs must own it,
A strange forbearance, for so hot a lover,
In this Antonio. It is now five years
Since first he sought Ginevra ; nearly four,
Since still he loved her, tho' another's wife ;
And—saving that his face is to be noted
Looking at hers wherever it appears,
At church, or the evening walk, or tournament,—
And that I've mark'd him drooping hereabouts,
Yet rather as some witless, lonely man,
Than one that shunn'd me,—my sharp household eyes
Have fix'd on no confusion of his making ;
No blush ; no haste ; no tactics of the chamber ;
No pertness of loud servant—not till now—
Till now ;—but then this *now* may show all this
To have been but a more deep and quiet mastery
Of crime and devilish knowledge—too secure
To move uneasily,—and too high scornful
Of me, to give me even the grace of trouble.
And yet this seal unbroken, and these words— [*Reading*

“Most harmless ;—I dare to add, most virtuous ? ”

And here again below ;—

“ I have written what I have written on the outside of this letter, hoping that it may move you to believe the possibility of its not being unworthy to meet the purest of mortal eyes.”

Filthiest hypocrite ! caught in his own bird-lime.

(Opens and reads the letter.)

“ As you have opened neither my first letter nor my second, written at intervals of six months each, from the moment when my name was first again mentioned to you since your marriage, I hardly dare hope that the words I am now writing shall have the blessedness of being looked upon, although they truly deserve it.

“ Truly, for most piteously they deserve it. I am going to reward (may I utter such a word ?) your kindness, by the greatest and most dreadful return I can make it. I will write to you no more.

“ But this promise is a thing so terrible to me, and so unsupportable, except in the hope of its doing you some good, that I have one reward to beg for myself ; not as a condition, but as a last and enduring charity.

“ I no longer ask you to love me, however innocently, or on the plea of its being some shadow of relief to you (in the sweet thought of loving) from an unhappiness, of which all the world speaks.

[AGOLANTI *pauses, greatly moved.*

Is it so then? and the world speaks of me,
And basely speaks! He has been talking then,
And acting too. But let me know this *all*. [*Reading.*

“Neither yet will I beg you not to hate me; for so gentle a heart cannot hate anybody; and you never were unjust, except to yourself. [*Pauses a little again.*

“But this I do beg; first, that you will take care of a health, which heaven has given you no right to neglect, whatever be your unhappiness; and which, under heaven, is the best support of it;—and secondly, that when you think of the friends of whom death has deprived you, or may deprive, and whom it will give you joy to meet again beyond the grave, you may not be unwilling to behold among them the face of

“ANTONIO RONDINELLI.

“Written with prayers and tears before the sacred image of the Virgin.”

[*AGOLANTI crosses himself, and pauses; then holds the letter apart, as if in disgust; and then again resumes his self-possession.*

Giulio, I think since first I took thee from
The orphan college, now some three years back,
I have been no unkind master to thee, nor poor one;
Have stinted thee in nought fitting thy station,
Nor hurt thy growth and blooming?

Giulio.

Sir, you hired me

For certain duties, which, with kindly allowance

For faults of youth, I hope I have performed.
My life has been most happy ; and my lady
Most bountiful to her poor songster. [Sheds tears.

Agolanti. Thou
Hast haply saved some little treasure then,
Against thy day of freedom ?

Giulio. Not a doit, sir.
What freedom should I think of, being free
From thought itself, and blithe as the blue day ?

Agolanti. Antonio Rondinelli is not rich.
His mother and he hide in proud poverty
From all but a few friends.

Giulio (aside). Noble Antonio !
He gave me a jewel, ere I knew him poor,
Worth twenty golden florins ; and his cap
Starved for it many a month.

Agolanti. New employers
Produce new duties, Giulio ; to the hurt,
Sometimes, of old ones ; and 'tis wise betimes
To see they vex and tangle not. These mixtures
Of services,—these new pure confidences
With masters not thine own,—these go-betweens
'Twixt virtue and virtue,—loves desiring not
Their own desires,—and such like angel-adulteries
(Heaven pardon me the word !)—suit me not, Giulio,
Nor a wise house. Therefore, before thine innocent
Lady (for such, with mutual love, I own her,

And scorn of this poor fop) learns dangerous pity
Of thy fair-seeming messages,—dangerous,
Not to her virtue, but her virtue's fame,—
This house thou leavest ! Thou wouldst taste the pride
Of poverty, and will, and kinless freedom—
Do so ! And when thou learn'st how friendship ends,
In treachery, and in thanklessness begun,
And the cold crust turns bitter and quarrelsome,
Blame not thou me ; nor think those tears are payment
For guilt on thy side, and for love on mine !

Giulio (aside). Love ! what a word from him ! and to
poor me,

Thus thrust upon the world, he knows not whither ;
(*Aloud*). Sir, you mistake my tears ; but 'tis no matter.
Guilty or not, I cannot quit this house
With thoughts less kind than sorrow.—Sir, farewell. [*Exit.*

Agolanti. 'Twas virtuously done, if not most falsely,
This seemingly celestial aversion
Of the very eyesight from unlawful words.
Or was it part of the system ?—of the show,—
Which frets me daily with malign excess
Of undemanded patience ? cold at best,
Resentful as the worst ! Antonio,
I do suspect, she loves not ; me, I know,
She hates ; me, whom she should love ; whom was bound
And sworn to love ; for which contempt and wrong,
Fools, that love half a story and whole blame,

Begin to babble against the person wrong'd !
Times are there, when I feel inclined to sweep
The world away from me, and lead my own
Life to myself, unlook'd into with eyes
That know me not ; but use, and sympathy
Even with those that wrong me, and the right
Of comely reputation, keep me still
Wearing a show of good with a grieved heart.

Enter a Servant.

Servant. My lady, sir, hearing of your return
Home suddenly, and having visitors,
Entreats the honour of your presence.

Agolanti (aside). Now
To test this hateful gossip. “ Suddenly ; ”—
Was that her word, or the knave's ? No matter. (*Aloud*)
Visitors,—

Who are they ?

Servant. Lady Olimpia, and her friend
Lady Diana, with two gentlemen ;
Strangers, I think, sir ; one a Roman gentleman,
Come from his Holiness's court.

Agolanti. The same,
Doubtless, I saw this morning ; by which token
The other is the sneering amorist,
Da Riva. He, I thought, respected me ;
But see—he knows these women, they Antonio—

Have I been hasty? or is—The black plague choke
All meddlers with—

To the Servant.

I will come speedily.

[Exeunt severally.]

SCENE III.

*Another Room in AGOLANTI'S house. GINEVRA, OLIMPIA,
DIANA, COLONNA, and DA RIVA, discovered sitting.
FIORDILISA standing behind her lady's chair.*

Olimpia. Dearest Lady Ginevra, to remain
Shut up when all the world are at the windows,
Or otherwise owning the great common joy,
Is clearly impossible.—Observe now, pray:—
On Friday the Pope comes; Saturday, chapel
At the Annunziata;—Sunday, at Saint Lorenzo;
Monday, the chase; Tuesday, the race; Wednesday,
The tilts and drama; and on Thursday he goes.
So there's six lives for you; a life a day,
To make you well again, and merry, and careless.

Colonna. Most vital arguments!

Ginevra.

Too vital, may-be.

Remember, Lady Olimpia, I have been ill;—
I am but getting better; and such draughts
Of pleasure and amazement, pour'd unceasing,
Might drown the little faculties of poor me.

Diana. One day—could you not try one day, and then Enjoy, or fear another, as it suited ?

Olimpia. Ay, one—one—one. Try but one day, and then Trust me if one day would not give you strength For pretty little two, and prettier three.

Da Riva. And, madam, the first day is both the noblest And the most gentle,—a flow of princely draperies Through draperied streets; bringing us, it is true, Emotion, but yet soothing it, and blessing With sacred hand. Weakness itself is touch'd At ceremonial sights like these, with sweet And no unstrengthening tears, bathing humility In heavenly reassurance. And, dear lady, 'Twill give a nature, so composed as yours With Christian grace and willing cheerfulness, A joy at once sacred, and earthly, and charming, To see the face of the accomplish'd man Whom Providence, most potent seen when mildest, Has raised to be the prince of Christendom In this our day, when wit is questioning faith, And mild religion answers with *his* eyes Of charity, the unanswerable conclusion.

Colonna. Da Riva, I am to bring thy verse and thee To his Beatitude's most knowing knowledge; But do thou step before me, and speak thus, And thou art made a cardinal.

Ginevra. Is his Holiness
So very and so beautifully gracious
To eloquence and letters ?

Colonna. I' faith, madam,
Our blessed Father seems to be of opinion,
That whatsoever good or beauty exists
Must needs belong, like angels, to the church ;
And as he finds them, where severer men
(Not the best judges of angels) might o'erlook them,
He makes us know them better ; bids them come
Forth from the crowd, and show their winged wits,
And rise, and sit within his princely beams.

Olimpia. Come ;—you accord ? you cannot resist reasons
Sweet as all these ? and to say truth, there is
One gentle reason more, which must convince you.
We want your husband's windows, lady mine ;—
They face the veriest heaven of all the streets
For seeing the procession ; and how can we
Enter that paradise of a balcony
Without the house's angel ? What would people
Say to the intruders, you not being there ?

Ginevra. Oh, nothing very unseasonable, be sure ;
Nor what the lilies and roses in their cheeks,
And wit in their eyes, could not refute most happily.
Well, dear Diana, should my husband's judgment
Encourage me to think my health would bear it,
I would fain venture, but—I hear him coming.

At all events, the windows will be gladly
Fill'd with your pleasures ; the report of which
Will afterwards make them mine. [Enter AGOLANTI.]

Sir, the ladies

Olimpia and Diana you know well ;
Also a name honour'd by all, Da Riva ;
Be pleased to know their friend, a courteous gentleman
From Rome, the Signor Cesare Colonna.

Agolanti. He's welcome, for his friend's sake, and his
own.

I trust our holy Father keeps his health, sir,
In this his gracious journey ?

Colonna. Sir, he holds him,
As his good habit is, in blest condition,
To the great joy of all that love good men
And sovereign church.

Agolanti. You hold, sir, I perceive,
Some happy office near his sacred person ?

Colonna. One of the poor captains of his guard, sir ;
Nor near enough to make the fortune proud,
Nor yet so far removed as not to share
Some grace of recognition.

Agolanti. I may not envy you :
But I may be allow'd to think such fortune
As happy, as 'tis worthily bestow'd.
Pardon me ; but this lady's delicate health
Will warrant some small trespass on your courtesies.

(To GINEVRA.) How fares it with my love these last three hours ?

Ginevra. (Cheerfully.) 'Thanks—I do very well.

Olimpia. I fear we have tired her
Somewhat, with our loud talk, Signor Francesco.

Ginevra. No ; 'tis like bright health come to talk with us :
Is it not ? (To her husband.)

Agolanti. (Aside.) She knows I hate it.—Lady Olimpia
Brings ever a sprightly stirring to the spirit,
And her fair friend a balm. (Aside to GINEVRA.) What
want they now,
This flaunter and this insipidity ?

Ginevra. (Aloud.) Our neighbour and her friends bring
a petition,
That it would please you to convenience them
With your fair windows for the coming spectacle ;
Yourself, if well enough, doubling the grace
With your good company.

Agolanti. (Aside.) I thought as much.
At every turn my will is to be torn from me,
And at her soft suggestion. (Aloud.) My windows
Cannot be better fill'd, than with such beauty,
And wit and modest eloquence.

Colonna. (Aside to DA RIVA.) Is he sneering ?
Or is his zeal, and fame for polite manners,
Proving itself, in spite of his own teeth ?
Sharpening its edge upon this oily venom ?

Da Riva. Somewhat of both ; he sneers, because he hates us ;

And would not have it seen, because he fears us.

His will and vanity count on our obtuseness,

Just as it suits them. (*AGOLANTI and the Ladies talk apart.*)

Colonna.

Noticed you how pale

The unhappy lady turn'd, when the song ended,

And she bade shut the door ?

Da Riva.

She's paler now.

Let's interrupt him.—Good Signor Francesco,

We thank you much ; but windows, friends, and spectacle,

And, let us add, warranted by his love,

Husband and all, would miss the topmost flower

Of our delight, were this sweet lady absent ;

And she has threaten'd us with the cruel chance,

Unless your better knowledge of her health

Think better, than herself, of its free right.

Agolanti. Oh Sir, it were impossible to know
A lady better than she knows herself.

What say you, Madam ? (*To GINEVRA.*)

Ginevra.

The best thought of all,

Perhaps, were to await the time's arrival,

And see how I feel then.

Agolanti.

Truly, methinks,

A discreet judgment, and approved by all

Who set the lady's welfare above all,

As we in this room do.

Olimpia. And every one
That knows her,—unless it be the devil himself.
Manners forgive my uttering his name
In such good company. Dearest Ginevra,
Come you with me. A word with you in private,
As we descend. And we'll request these gentlemen
To clear our way before us.

Colonna and *Da Riva*. A fair day
To Signor Agolanti, and may fairer
Befall us this day week. (*Going.*)

Olimpia. Yes, Signor mine,
Be sure you make your wife well by that day,
With some transcendent charmingness ; or none
But envious wives, and horrible old men,
Will think you the good spouse you are, or let you
Have any peace.

Agolanti. (*Fiercely to his wife as she is going.*) What
insolence is this,
And woman's plot? Be in the purple chamber
In twenty minutes. Do you hear me *speak*?

(*He wrings her hand sharply, and she makes signs of obedience.*)

A fair day to my courteous visitors,
And may they ever have the joy they bring.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A Garden of Diana's Villa.

Enter RONDINELLI, COLONNA, and DA RIVA.

Colonna. I pray thee, Antonio, be comforted.

Rondinelli. I am, I am ; as far as friends can comfort me :

And they do comfort. How can I love love,
And not love all things lovely ? sweet discourse,
And kindness, and dear friendships. But this suffering
Sweet saint,—the man, the household fiend, I mean—
Will kill her.

Colonna. I tell thee, no. In the first place
Her health is really better. Is it not ?

Da Riva. Olimpia and Diana both have staked
Their credit on it. The man's a fool no doubt,
But she is wise.

Colonna. Ay, is she ; for lo ! secondly,
She loves thee, Antonio.

Da Riva. Yes ; by that pure look
We told thee of, at mention of thy name,
She does ;—it was as though her mind retreated

To some blest, serious thought, far off but possible ;
Then ended with a sigh.

Colonna.

And blush'd withal.

(*Aside.*) I did not see the blush, I must confess;
But being so virtuous, there must have been one,
And he'll be glad to hear of it. (*Aloud.*) Well, seeing
She loves thee then, as thou must needs believe,
For all that modest earthquake of thine head,
Bethink thee what a life *within* a life
She has to retire into, sweet and secret,
For help from common temper such as his;
Help, none the worse, eh? for a small, small bit
Of stubbornness, such as the best gentle wives
Must have in self-defence. Now——

And therefore greater power to bear); and yet
 They do not kill; partly, because of lovers;
 Partly, of pride; partly, indifference;
 Partly, of hate (a good stanch long-lived passion);
 Partly, because all know the common case,
 And custom's custom. There'll be a hundred couples
 To-night, 'twixt Porta Pinti and San Gallo,
 Cutting each other's hearts out with mild looks,
 Upon the question, whether the Pope's mule
 Will be in purple or scarlet;—yet not one
 Will die of it; no, 'faith; nor were a death
 To happen, would the survivors' eyes refuse
 A tear to their old disputant and partner,
 That kept life moving somehow.

Rondinelli.

By which logic

You would infer, to comfort me, that all
 Marriages are unhappy.

Colonna.

Not unhappy,

Though not very happy.

Da Riva.

With exceptions?

Colonna. Surely——for such good fellows as ourselves!

Da Riva.

And doubtless

A time will come——

Colonna.

Oh, ay; a time will come——

Poet and prophet—*Redeunt Saturnia regna.*

Now hear him on his favourite golden theme,

“A time will come;”—a time, eh? when all marriages

Shall be like some few dozen ; exceptions, rules ;
Every day, Sunday ; and each man's pain in the head
A crowning satisfaction !

Da Riva.

No ; but still

A time, when sense and reason shall have grown
As much more rife than now, and foolish thorns
As much less in request, as we, now living,
Surpass rude times and savage ancestors.
Improvement stopp'd not at the muddy cave,
Why at the rush-strewn chamber ? The wild man's dream,
Or what he might have dreamt, when at his wildest,
Is, to the civilised man, his commonplace :
And what should time so reverence in ourselves,
As in his due good course, not still to alter ?

Colonna. Till chariots run some twenty miles an hour ?

Da Riva. Ay, thirty or forty.

Colonna.

Oh ! oh ! Without horses ?

Say, without horses.

Da Riva.

Well, to oblige you,—yes.

Colonna. And sailing-boats without a sail ! Ah, ha !

Well, glory be to poetry and to poets !

Their cookery is no mincing ! Ah ! ha ! ha !

[*They both laugh.*]

They certainly, while they're about it, do
Cut and carve worlds out, with their golden swords,
To which poor Alexander's was a pumpkin.
What say you, Antonio ?

Rondinelli. My dear friends both,
What you were saying of the good future time
Made me but think too sadly of the present ;
Pardon me—I should think more sadly far,
But for your loves and ever generous patience.
Yet let me take you back to our fair friends,
From whom my gusty griefs bore you away.
Nay, my good wish rewards me :—see, one comes.

Enter OLIMPIA.

Olimpia. A certain Giulio, in a pretty grief
Though for himself alone, and not another,
Inquires for Signor Rondinelli.

[ANTONIO *kisses her hand and exit.*

'Twas lucky that I saw this Giulio first,
For he's a page of pages ; a Spartan boy ;—
Quite fix'd on telling his beloved Signor
Antonio all the truths which the said Signor
May now, or at any time in all futurity,
Insist on knowing. Poor fellow ! he's turn'd away.

Da Riva.

For what ?

Olimpia.

Come in,

And you shall hear. Your ices and sherbets
Await you ; and your cheeks will need the cooling.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A Chamber hung with purple, and containing a cabinet picture of the Madonna, but otherwise little furnished.

GINEVRA discovered sitting at a window.

Enter AGOLANTI.

Agolanti. Every way she opposes me, even with arms
Of peace and love. I bade remove that picture
From this deserted room. Can she have had it
Brought back this instant, knowing how my anger,
Just though it be, cannot behold unmoved
The face of suffering heaven? Oh artifice
In very piety! 'Twere piety to veil it
From our discourse, and look another way.

[During this speech, GINEVRA comes forward, and AGOLANTI, after closing the cabinet doors over the picture, hands her a chair; adjusting another for himself, but continuing to stand.]

Ginevra. (Cheerfully.) The world seems glad after its
hearty drink
Of rain. I fear'd when you came back this morning,
The shower had stopp'd you, or that you were ill.

Agolanti. You fear'd! you hoped. What fear you that
I fear,
Or hope for that I hope for? A truce, madam,

To these exordiums and pretended interests,
Whose only shallow intent is to delay,
Or to divert, the sole dire subject,—me.
Soh ! you would see the spectacle ! you, who start
At openings of doors, and falls of pins.
Trumpets and drums quiet a lady's nerves ;
And a good hacking blow at a tournament
Equals burnt feathers or hartshorn, for a stimulus
To pretty household tremblers.

Ginevra. I express'd
No wish to see the tournament, nor indeed
Anything, of my own accord ; or contrary
To your good judgment.

Agolanti. Oh, of course not. Wishes
Are never express'd for, or by, contraries ;
Nor the good judgment of an anxious husband
Held forth as a pleasant thing to differ with.

Ginevra. It is as easy as sitting in my chair,
To say I will not go: and I will not.
Be pleased to think that settled.

Agolanti. The more easily,
As 'tis expected *I should* go, is it not ?
And then you will sit happy at receipt
Of letters from Antonio Rondinelli.

Ginevra. Return'd unopen'd, sir.

Agolanti. How many ?

Ginevra. Three.

Agolanti. You are correct, as to those three. How
many
Open'd?—Your look, madam, is wondrous logical;
Conclusive by mere pathos of astonishment;
And cramm'd with scorn, from pure unscornfulness.
I have, 'tis true, strong doubts of your regard
For him, or any one;—of your love of power
None,—as you know I have reason;—tho' you take
Ways of refined provokingness to wreak it.
Antonio knows these fools you saw but now,
And fools have foolish friendships, and bad leagues
For getting a little power, not natural to them,
Out of their laugh'd-at betters. Be it as it may,
All this, I will not have these prying idlers
Put my domestic troubles to the blush;
Nor you sit thus, in ostentatious meekness,
Playing the victim with a pretty breath,
And smiles that say “God help me.”—Well, madam,
What do *you* say?

Ginevra. I say I will do whatever
You think best, and desire.

Agolanti. And make the worst of it
By whatsoever may mislead, and vex?
There—now you make a pretty sign, as tho'
Your silence were compell'd.

Ginevra. What can I say,
Or what alas! not say, and not be chided?

You should not use me thus. I have not strength for it,
So great as you may think. My late sharp illness
Has left me weak.

Agolanti. I've known you weaker, madam,
But never feeble enough to want the strength
Of contest and perverseness. Oh, men too,
Men may be weak, even from the magnanimity
Of strength itself; and women can take poor
Advantages, that were in men but cowardice.

Ginevra. (Aside) Dear Heaven! what humblest doubts
of our self-knowledge
Should we not feel, when tyranny can talk thus.

Agolanti. Can you pretend, madam, with your surpassing
Candour and heavenly kindness, that you never
Utter'd one gently-sounding word, not meant
To give the hearer pain? me pain? your husband?
Whom in all evil thoughts you so pretend
To be unlike.

Ginevra. I cannot dare pretend it.
I am a woman, not an angel.

Agolanti. Ay,
See there—you have! you own it! how pretend then
To make such griefs of every petty syllable,
Wrung from myself by everlasting scorn?

Ginevra. One pain is not a thousand; nor one wrong,
Acknowledged and repented of, the habit
Of unprovoked and unrepented years.

Agolanti. Of unprovoked ! Oh, let all provocation
Take every brutish shape it can devise
To try endurance with ; taunt it in failure,
Grind it in want, stoop it with family shames,
Make gross the name of mother, call it fool,
Pander, slave, coward, or whatsoever opprobrium
Makes the soul swoon within its rage, for want
Of some great answer, terrible as its wrong,
And it shall be as nothing to this miserable,
Mean, meek-voiced, most malignant lie of lies,
This angel-mimicking non-provocation
From one too cold to enrage, and weak to tread on !
You never loved me once—You loved me not—
Never did—no—not when before the altar
With a mean coldness, a worldly-minded coldness
And lie on your lips, you took me for your husband,
Thinking to have a house, a purse, a liberty,
By, but not for, the man you scorn'd to love !

Ginevra. I scorn'd you not—and knew not what scorn
was—

Being scarcely past a child, and knowing nothing
But trusting thoughts and innocent daily habits.
Oh, could you trust yourself—But why repeat
What still is thus repeated day by day,
Still ending with the question, “ Why repeat ? ”

[*Rising and moving about.*

You make the blood at last mount to my brain,

And tax me past endurance. What have I done,
Good God ! what have I done, that I am thus
At the mercy of a mystery of tyranny,
Which from its victim demands every virtue,
And brings it none ?

Agolanti. I thank you, madam, humbly.
That was sincere, at least.

Ginevra. I beg your pardon.
Anger is ever excessive, and speaks wrong.

Agolanti. This is the gentle, patient, unprovoked,
And unprovoking, never-answering she !

Ginevra. Nay, nay, say on ;—I do deserve it,—I
Who speak such evil of anger, and then am angry.
Yet you might pity me too, being like yourself
In fellowship there at least.

Agolanti. A taunt in friendliness !
Meekness's happiest condescension !

Ginevra. No,
So help me Heaven !—I but spoke in consciousness
Of what was weak on both sides. There's a love
In that, would you but know it, and encourage it.
The consciousness of wrong, in wills not evil,
Brings charity. Be you but charitable,
And I am grateful, and we both shall learn.

Agolanti. I am conscious of no wrong in this dispute,
Nor when we dispute, ever,—except the wrong
Done to myself by a will far more wilful,

Because less moved, and less ingenuous.

Let them get charity, that show it.

Ginevra (who has reseated herself). I pray you,
Let Fiordilisa come to me. My lips
Will show you that I faint.

[*AGOLANTI rings a bell on the table ; and FIORDILISA enters to her mistress.*

Agolanti. When you have seen your mistress well
again,

Go to Matteo ; and tell him, from herself,
That 'tis her orders she be excused at present
To all that come, her state requiring it,
And convalescence. Mark you that addition.

She's getting well ; but to get well, needs rest. [*Exit.*

Fiordilisa. Needs rest ! Alas ! When will you let her
rest,

But in her grave ? My lady ! My sweet mistress !

[*Applying a volatile to her temples.*

She knows me.—He has gone :—the Signor's gone.

(*Aside.*) She sighs, as though she mourn'd him.

Ginevra (listening). What's that ?

Fiordilisa. Nothing, madam ;—I heard nothing.

Ginevra. Everything

Gives me a painful wonder ;—you, your face,

These walls. My hand seems to me not more human,

Than animal ; and all things unaccountable.

'Twill pass away. What's that ? [*A church-organ is heard*

Fiordilisa.

Yes, I hear that.

'Tis Father Anselmo, madam, in the chapel,
Touching the new organ. In truth, I ask'd him,
Thinking that as the Signor is so moved
By whatsoever speaks to him of religion,
It might have done no harm to you and him, madam,
To hear it while conversing. But he's old
And slow, is the good father.

[GINEVRA *kisses her, and then weeps abundantly.*

Ginevra. Thank Heaven! thank Heaven and the sweet
sounds! I have not
Wept, Fiordilisa, now, for many a day,
And the sound freshens me ;—loosens my heart.

[*Music.*

O blessed music! at thy feet we lie,
Pitied of angels surely.

Fiordilisa.

Perhaps, madam,

You will rest here, and try to sleep awhile?

Ginevra. No, Fiordilisa (*rising*). Meeting what must be,
Is half commanding it; and in this breath
Of heaven my mind feels duty set erect,
Fresh out of tears. Bed is for night, not day,
When duty's done. So cheer we as we may.

[*Exeunt ; the music continuing.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A Room in AGOLANTI'S Villa.

Enter AGOLANTI.

Agolanti. What have I done, great heavens! to be thus
tortured?

My gates beset with these inquisitive fools;
A wife, strong as her hate, so I be dumb,
Falling in gulfs of weakness for a word;
And all the while, dastardly nameless foes,
Who know where I am weak, filling my household
With talk of ominous things,—sad mourning shapes
That walk my grounds, none knowing how they enter'd;
And in the dead of night, outcries for help,
As of a female crouching to the door.
Let me be met by daylight, man to man,
If 'tis to come to this; and to loud lies
Answer with my contempt, and with my sword.

Enter a Servant.

Servant. The gentlemen that were here the other day,

Signor Da Riva, and the Roman gentleman,
Desire to kiss your hands.

Agolanti. Fool ! were not orders

Given you to admit no one ?

Servant. To my lady, sir ;

We did not understand, to you.

Agolanti. Idiots and torments !

Enter DA RIVA and COLONNA. Exit Servant.

Colonna. We kiss your hands, courteous Signor Francesco.

Da Riva. And come to thank you for the seats you have given us.

In all the city there is no such throne
Of comfort, for a sovereign command
Of the best part o' the show ; which will be glorious.

Colonna. And with your lady for the queen o' the throne,
The Pope himself may look up as he walks,
And worship you with envy.

Agolanti. Nay, sirs, you are too flattering. Perhaps
The lady—

Colonna. And what makes us the more delighted
With your determination thus to give her
Unto the grateful spectacle, is a certain
Vile talk, sir, that has come to our disdainful
And most incredulous ears of—What do you think ?

Da Riva. Ay, sir, 'twill tax your fancy.

Colonna. Of your jealousy ;
Nay cruelty, forsooth !

Da Riva. We laugh'd it down ;
Look'd it i' the foolish face, and made it blush.
Yes, sir, the absurdity was put out of countenance ;
But then, you know, that countenance was but one ;
And twenty absurd grave faces, going about,
Big with a scandal, are as fertile as bees,
And make as busy multitudes of fools.

Agolanti. Sirs, with this sudden incursion of strange
news—

And your as strange, I must say, though well-meant
Fancy, of the necessity of refuting it—

Colonna. Fancy, good sir !—Dear sir, we are most loath
To shock your noble knowledge of yourself
With the whole truth—with the whole credulous fiction ;
But to convince you how requisite is the step
Thus to be taken in the truth's behalf,
The theme is constant, both in court and market-place,
That you're a very tyrant !

Da Riva. And to a saint !
Vex her from morn to night—

Colonna. Frighten her—

Da Riva. Cast her
Into strange swoons, and monstrous shows of death.

Agolanti. Monstrous indeed ! and shows ! That is most
true.

Those are the shows ! and I am to be at the spectacle
To let her face make what display it can
Of the mean lie, and mock me to the world.
Pardon me—I'm disturb'd—I'm not myself—
My house is not quite happy—you see it—Whose is ?
But look, sir,—Why should Florence fall on me ?
Why select me, as the scape-goat of a common
And self-resented misery ? 'Tis a lie,
A boy's lie, a turn'd-off servant's lie,
That mine is a worse misery than their own,
Or more deserved. You know the Strozzi family,
You know the Baldi, Rossi, Brunelleschi—
You do, Signor Da Riva,—the Guidi also,
And Arregucci :—well,—are they all smiles ?
All comfort ? Is there, on the husbands' sides,
No roughness ? no plain-speaking ? or, on the wives',
No answering, tart or otherwise ?—no black looks ?
No softest spite ; nor meekness, pale with malice ?
No smile with the teeth set, shivering forth a sneer ?
Take any dozen couples, the first you think of,
'Those you know best ; and see, if matrimony
Has been success with them, or a dull failure ;
Dull at the best ; probably, damn'd with discord ;
A hell, the worse for being carried about
With quiet looks ; or, horriblemst of all,
Betwixt habitual hate and fulsome holiday.

Da Riva. Oh, sir, you wrong poor mix'd humanity,

And think not how much nobleness relieves it,
Nor what a heap of good old love there lies
Sometimes in seeming quarrel. I thought you, sir,
I must confess, a more enduring Christian.

Colonna. And churchman, sir. I own I have been
astonish'd—

Pardon one somewhat nearer than yourself
Unto the church's prince—to hear you speak
Thus strangely of a holy ordinance.

Agolanti (aside). These men will make me mad. Have
they come here

To warn me, or to torment me?—Sir, the earth
Holds not a man bows down with lowlier front
To holy church and to all holy ordinances :
It is their worldly violation mads me.
If my poor name be ever in sacred mouths,
I pray thee say so ; and add, I am a man
Not happy quite perhaps, more than some others
Of mankind's fallen race, in my home's Eve ;
Who, with some humours, yet is good as fair,
And only makes me unhappy in the excess
Of my desire to make herself most blessed.
My conscience thus discharged, look'ye, fair sir,—
A man of a less trusting sort—

Enter a Servant.

Servant. My lady, sir,
Being worse since her last seizure at day-break,

The Nurse would fain send in the neighbourhood
For—

Agolanti. Bid her do so. Tell her to send instantly
For whom she pleases. (*Exit Servant.*) You will pardon me;—
This troubled house of mine—At the good spectacle,
I shall behold you.

Colonna. We take anxious leave, sir,
Wishing you all good speed with the sweet lady.
But something we had forgotten, in our zeal
To tell our own poor story, tho' we came
Partly to give it you,—a letter, sir,
From a most dear and excellent friend of ours;
Who, we dare say it, for reasons which your delicacy
Will be glad, too, to turn to like fair grace
Of liberal trust and gentle interpretation,
Wishes your house all good and quiet fame.
'Tis something very special that he writes of,
So he assures us, and of instant urgency;
But what we know not. [*Exeunt.*

Agolanti (reads). “If Signor Agolanti values his wife's
peace, *and life*, he will meet the writer of this letter instantly;
who will wait for him, an hour from the receipt of it, in the
wood near his gate, by the road-side leading to Cortona.

“ANTONIO RONDINELLI.”

'Tis as I fear'd. He knows them, as I thought,
And well? Is it a league? Conspiracy?
And face to face too! He! This beats all boldness.

'Sdeath, must my time be *his* too ! What strange matter
Can give him right of speech ! " Her life ! " Who seeks it ?
What bloody juggle is to beset me now ?
I'll meet thee, Antonio ; and before we part,
Strange mystery shall be pluck'd from some one's heart.

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

A Wood. RONDINELLI *discovered waiting.*

Rondinelli. My bosom is so full, my heart wants air ;
It fears even want of utterance ; fears the man,
For very loathing ; fears his horrible right,
His lawless claim of lawfulness ; and feels
Shame at his poisonous want of shame and manhood.
Yet she endures him ; she can smile to him,
Would have him better. Oh, heavenly Ginevra !
Name, which to breathe puts pity in the air,
I know that to deserve to be thy friend
Should be to show all proofs of gentlest right.
Oh be the spirit of thine hand on mine ;—
Hang by me, like a light, a face, an angel,
To whom I turn for privilege of blest patience,
Letting me call thee my soul's wife !

He comes.

Enter AGOLANTI.

Agolanti. I recognise the Signor Rondinelli;
And in him, if I err not, the inditer
Of a strange letter.—He would speak with me?

Rondinelli. Pardon me. I am sensible that I trespass
On many delicacies, which at first confuse me.
Be pleased to look upon them all as summ'd
In this acknowledgment, and as permitted me
To hold acquitted in your coming hither.
I would fain speak all calmly and christianly.

Agolanti. You spoke of my wife's life. 'Twas that that
brought me.

Rondinelli. Many speak of it.

Agolanti. To what end?

Rondinelli. They doubt

If you are aware on what a delicate thread
It hangs.

Agolanti. Mean you of health?

Rondinelli. I do.

Agolanti. 'Twere strange,

If I knew not the substance of the tenure,
Seeing it daily.

Rondinelli. A daily sight—pardon me—
May, on that very account, be but a dull one.—
I pray you, do not think I use plain words

From wish to offend : I have but one object— such
As all must have, who know, or ever have known,
The lady,—you above all others.

Agolanti.

Truly, sir,

You, and these knowing friends of yours, or hers,
Whom I know not, might leave the proverb alone,
Which says that a fool knows better what occurs
In his own house, than a wise man does in another's.
Good Signor Antonio, I *endure* you
Out of a sort of pity : you understand me ;
Perhaps not quite a just one. This same letter
Is not the first of yours, that has intruded
Into my walls.

Rondinelli.

We understand each other
In some things, Signor Agolanti, and well ;
In some things one of us is much mistaken ;
But one thing we know perfectly, both of us,—
The spotlessness of her, concerning whom
We speak, with conscious souls, thus face to face.—
Signor Agolanti, I humbly beg of you,
Well nigh with tears, which you may pity, and welcome,
So you deny them not, that it will please you
To recollect, that the best daily eyes,
The wisest and the kindest, made secure
By custom and gradation, may see not
In the fine dreadful fading of a face
What others see.

Agolanti. Signor Antonio,—

When others allow others to rule their houses,
To dictate commonplaces, and to substitute
For long experience and uncanting love
Their meddling self-sufficiency, their envious
Wish to find fault, and most impertinent finding it,
When this is the custom and the fashion, then,
And not till then, will I throw open my doors
To all my kind good masters of fair Florence,
To come and know more in my house than I do ;
To see more, hear more, have a more inward taste
Of whatsoever is sweet and sacred in it,
And then vouchsafe me their opinions: order me
About, like some new household animal
Call'd servant-husband, they being husband-gods,
Yet condescending to all collateral offices
Of gossip, eaves-dropper, consulting-doctor,
Beggarily paymaster of discarded page,
Themselves discarded suitor.

Rondinelli. (Aside.) Help me, angel,
Against a pride, that, seeing thee, is nothing.—
You know full well, Francesco Agolanti,
That though a suitor for the prize you won
(Oh ! what a prize ! and what a winning ! enough
Surely to make you bear with him that lost),
Discarded I could not be, never, alas !
Having found acceptance. My acquaintance

Not long preceded yours ; and was too brief
To let my love win on her filial eyes,
Before your own came beaming with that wealth,
Which, with all other shows of good and prosperous,
Her parents justly thought her due. For writing to her
Since, with whatever innocence (as you know)
And for any opinions of yourself
In which I may have wrong'd you, I am desirous
To hold my own will in a constant state
Of pardon-begging and self-sacrifice,
And will engage never to trouble more
Your blessed doors (for such I'll hope they will be)
One thing provided.—Sir, it is,—
That in consideration of your possessing
A treasure, which all men will think and speak of
(The more to the just pride of him that owns it),
You will be pleased to show, even ostentatiously,
What more than care, at this supposed sad juncture,
You take of it : will call in learned eyes
To judge of what your own too happy ones
May slide o'er too securely ; will thus revenge
Your wrong on ill mouths, by refuting them ;
And secure kindlier ones from the misfortune
Of being uncharitable towards yourself.

Agolanti. I will not suffer, more than other men,
That wrong should be assumed of me, and bend me
To what it pleases. What I know, I know ;

What in that knowledge have done, shall still do.
The more you speak, the greater is the insult
To one that asks not your advice, nor needs it;
Nor am I to be trick'd into submission
To a pedantic and o'erweening insolence,
Because it treats me like a child, with gross
Self-reconciling needs and sugary fulsomeness.
Go back to the world you speak of, you yourself,
True infant; and learn better from its own school.
You tire me.

Rondinelli. Stay; my last words must be heard.—
In nothing then will there be any difference
From what the world now see?

Agolanti. In nothing, fool!—
Why should there? Am I a painter's posture-figure?
A glove to be made to fit? a public humour?
To hear you is preposterous; not to trample you
A favour, which I know not why I show.

Rondinelli. I'll tell you.
'Tis because you, with cowardly tyranny,
Presume on the bless'd shape that stands between us;
Ay, with an impudence of your own, immeasurable,
Skulk at an angel's skirts.

Agolanti. I laugh at you.
And let me tell you at parting, that the way
To serve a lady best, and have her faults
Lightliest admonish'd by her lawful helper,

Is not to thrust a lawless vanity
'Twixt him and his vex'd love.

Rondinelli.

Utter that word

No second time. Blaspheme not its religion.
And mark me, once for all. I know you proud,
Rich, sanguine during passion, sullen after it,
Purchasing shows of mutual respect,
With bows as low, as their recoil is lofty ;
And thinking that the world and you, being each
No better than each other, may thus ever,
In smooth accommodation of absurdity,
Move prosperous to your graves. But also I know you
Misgiving amidst all of it ; more violent
Than bold, more superstitious ev'n than formal ;
More propp'd up by the public breath, than vital
In very self-conceit. Now mark me——

Agolanti.

A beggar

Mad with detection, barking like his cur !

Rondinelli. Mark me, impostor. Let that saint be
worse

By one hair's-breadth of sickness, and you take
No step to show that you would have prevented it,
And every soul in Florence, from the beggar
Up to the princely sacredness now coming,
Shall be loud on you, and loathe you. Boys shall follow
you,
Plucking your shuddering skirts ; women forego,

For woman's sake, their bashfulness, and speak
Words at you, as you pass ; old friends not know you ;
Enemies meet you, friend-like ; and when, for shame,
You shut yourself in-doors, and take to your bed,
And die of this world by day, and the next by night,
The nurse, that makes a penny of your pillow,
And would desire you gone, but your groans pay her,
Shall turn from the last agony in your throat,
And count her wages !

Agolanti (drawing his sword). Death in thine own throat.

Rondinelli. Tempt me not.

Agolanti.

Coward !

Rondinelli (drawing his sword). All you saints bear witness !

[*Cries of "Agolanti ! Signor Agolanti !"*]

Enter Servants in disorder.

First Servant. My lady, sir.

Agolanti.

What of her ?

Servant.

Sir, she is dead.

Agolanti. Thou say'st what cannot be. A hundred
times

I've seen her worse than she is now.

Rondinelli.

Oh horror !

To hear such words, knowing the end !—Oh dreadful !

But is it true, good fellow ? Thou art a man,

And hast moist eyes. Say that they served thee dimly.

Servant. Hark, sir.

[*The passing-bell is heard. They all take off their caps, except AGOLANTI.*

Rondinelli. She's gone; and I am alone. Earth's blank; Misery certain.—The cause, alas! the cause!

[*Passionately to AGOLANTI.*

Uncover thee, irreverent infamy!

Agolanti (uncovering). Infamy thou, to treat thus ruffianly

A mute-struck sorrow.

Rondinelli. Oh God! to hear him talk!

To hear him talk, and know that he has slain her!

Bear witness, you—you of his household—you,

That knew him best, and what a poison he was—

He has slain her.—What you all fear'd would be, has come,

And the mild thread that held her heart, is broken.

Agolanti (going off with the Servants). Pietro, I say, and Giotto! away! away!

[*Exit with Servants.*

Rondinelli. Ay, ay; to justice with him! Whither with me?

[*Exeunt opposite.*

END OF ACT THE THIRD.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

*A Room in the House of DA RIVA. COLONNA, OLIMPIA,
and DIANA, discovered, the first looking out of a window.
A funeral-bell is tolling at intervals.*

Colonna. By the moving of the crowd the funeral comes.
No;—yet I thought I heard the Choristers.

Diana. You did. Hark now—

[A faint sound of Choristers.

And now like some sweet sigh
Of heaven and earth it pauses.—You look sadder,
Signor Colonna, than you thought you should,
Within this festal week.

Colonna. 'Faith, gentle lady,
I'd rather hear upon a winter's night,
A dozen trumpets of the enemy
Blow 'gainst my nestled cheek, than this poor weakness,
Which comes to pass us, standing idly thus,
Swallowing the lumpish sorrow in one's throat,
'Twixt rage and pity.

Olimpia. I have noted oft,
That eyes, that have kept dry their cups of tears,
The moment they were touch'd by music's fingers,
Trembled, brimfull.

Diana. It is the meeting, love,
Of beauty so divine, with earth so weak.
We swell within us with immortal thoughts,
And then take pity on the feeble riddle,
That lies thus cold, and thus rebuked in death.

*[Choristers resume, and continue during the
dialogue.]*

Colonna. I heard as I came in, one who has seen her
Laid on the bier, say that she looks most heavenly.

Diana. I saw her lately, as you'll see her now,
Lying but newly dead, her blind sweet looks
Border'd with lilies, which her pretty maiden,
'Twixt tears and kisses, put about her hair,
To show her spotless life, and that wrong man
Dared not forbid, for very piteous truth ;
And as she lay thus, not more unresisting
Than all her life, I pitied even him,
To think, that let him weep, or ask her pardon
Never so much, she could not answer more.

Colonna. They turn the corner now, and now they pass.

*[The Choristers suddenly become loud, and are
heard passing underneath the window. After
they have passed, COLONNA resumes.]*

Farewell, sweet soul ! Death and thy patient life
Were so well match'd, I scarce can think thee alter'd.

Enter DA RIVA.

How now, Da Riva ? Found you not Antonio,
That thus you look amazed ? What is't ? No harm
To his poor self ?

Da Riva. None, none ; to him, or any ;
None that shall be ; monstrous, and strange, and horrible,
As ignorance of the peril might have made it.

Colonna, }
Olimpia, } To whom ?
and *Diana.* }

Da Riva. Prepare to hear, and to endure,
A chance, the very hope of which is awful,
It raises up a vision with a look
So mixed of life and death.

Colonna, }
Olimpia, } What is it ?
and *Diana.* }

Da Riva. You,
Colonna, will to Antonio instantly,
To keep him ignorant till all be known :
You, my sweet friends, with me, to seek some nest
Of balm and comfort, close upon the spot,
Against a chance—Think me not mad, but hearken.

Diana. He has murdered her ! He thought to murder
her,

And his hand failed.

Olimpia. Poison ! Oh Heavens !

Colonna. Pray, calm them.

Da Riva. Scarcely ten minutes had I left you here,
When Fiordilisa, paler than her mistress,
Found me with Giulio by Antonio's door.

Colonna. You have not seen him then ?

Da Riva. Yes ;—the poor maiden
Told us of an appearance she had noted
All night about the lips of the dear lady
Which made her call to mind stories, too true,
Of horrors in the dreadful pestilence,
Of hasty shrouds, sleeps found to have been sleeps only,
And gentle creatures grown so desperate,
That they had raised their hands against their lives
For waking to the sense of life itself.

Olimpia. Where now they bear her !

Diana. Not unknown.

Colonna. Be tranquil,
Watch has been set ?

Da Riva. And will look close till morn.
Giulio, from time to time, 'twixt them and us,
Will fly with news ; and meantime sweep we all
Each to our tasks, and bless the hope that sets them.
If true, oh think where but in sleep she lies :
If vain, she still will bless us from the skies.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A Cemetery, with an open Vault in the back-ground, and a dim noise of revelry, as from some house in the neighbourhood.

Enter GIULIO.

Giulio. What devilishness, and outrage to the dead,
About whose homes the rudest-footed churl
Treads softly, e'en by day. The noble hearts
I serve, have been so generous, that these drunkards
Count it but as a folly worth their cheating,
And have shut up their promised vigilance
Within the roaring wine-house. (*Noise again.*) Only one
Remains within the gate, who let me in,
Staring 'twixt sleep and glass-eyed sottishness.
Yet see—the vault has been left open, wide
As fear could wish. What, if !—Methinks the man
Look'd at me yonder ;—yes, and is still looking ;—(*Noise
again*)
And now the noise allures him, and he turns.
Hark ! Not a sound, but when the riot swells!
So still all else, that I can hear the grass
Whisper, as in lament, through its lorn hair.
I'll in, and look.—What if a hope almost

As dreadful, for the moment, as worst fear,
Show to my heart its selfish cowardice,
And I should see her, not still laid, but risen !
Sitting perhaps, with eyes encountering mine,
And muttering lips ! I'll take thy burden, horror,
Upon me, for love's sake and gratitude's ;
Oh will I, Heaven ! e'en should my knees melt under me,
And every pore turn to a swoon of water.

[He enters the Vault, and returns.

Gone ! Borne away ? or of her own self gone ?
Gone, without friend to help, or to pursue !
And whither ? or with help itself how dreadful !
What hands for lilied innocence in the night !
Perhaps that very house—What ho, there !—you !

[The gate of the Cemetery is loudly shut.

He shuts the gate ! he shuts, and is himself
Gone ! and forbid it, Heaven, not for my sake,
But hers, but hers, left me, perhaps on purpose,
To call in vain, and 'gainst the bolts grow mad !
Pardon, sweet Heavens ! I'll not be mad, for fear
Of madness, but be calm. What ho, there ! Stay !
Come back, for Heaven's sweet sake, and open the doors.

[Exit.

SCENE III.

A Room in AGOLANTI'S House in Florence. AGOLANTI discovered looking out of an open window, and then quitting it. Sound of lutes in the distance.

Agolanti. That sound of homeward lutes, which I arose
Out of my restless bed, to feel companion'd with,
For some few passing moments, was the last
To-night in Florence. Not a footstep more
Touches the sleeping streets; that now seem witch'd
With the same fears that walk around me still,
Ready to greet me with unbearable eyes.
All air seems whispering of me; and things visible
Take meaning in their shapes, not safe to know.
Oh that a masculine and religious soul
Should be thus feeble! And why? what should I fear?
My name has worship still; and still will have it,
If honourable wealth and sacred friends
Can shield it from mad envy; and if I err'd
Sometimes as husband, she I loved err'd more,
With spirit so swelling as outstrain'd her life.
Oh, every man's infirmities, more or less,
Mix with his love; and they who in excess
Feel not all passions, felt not love like mine,

Nor knew what worlds, when my despair seem'd angriest,
I could have given for one, for but one look
Of sure and heartfelt pity in her eyes.
But she is gone; and for whate'er I did
Not well, I have humbled me to the god of power;
And given the shrine, near which her dust is laid,
New glorious beams of paintings and of gold,
Doubling its heaven to the white angelical tapers;
For which, they say, the sovereign Holiness
Himself will thank me. And yet,—thus, even thus,
I feel,—a shudderer at the very silence,
Which seems preparing me some angeriness.
I'll close the window; and rouse Ippolito
To read to me in some religious book.

[*Going towards the window, he stops and listens.*

What was it? a step? a voice?

Ginevra (is heard outside). Agolanti!

Francesco Agolanti! husband!

Agolanti (crossing himself and moving towards the window). It draws me,

In horror, to look on it.—Oh God!—I see it!

There is—something there—standing in the moonlight.

Ginevra. Come forth, and help me in—Oh help me in!

Agolanti. It speaks! (*very loudly.*) I cannot bear the
dreadfulness!

The horror's in my throat, my hair, my brain!

Detestable thing! witch! mockery of the blessed!

Hide thee ! Be nothing ! Come heaven and earth betwixt us !

[He closes the shutters in a frenzy, and then rushes apart.

Oh God ! a little life ;— a little reason ;—

Till I reach the arms of the living.— Ippolito !

Tonio ! Giuseppe ! Lights ! Wake Father Angelo !

[He staggers out.

SCENE IV.

*A retired corner in Florence, in front of RONDINELLI'S House,
with Garden-wall and Trees. RONDINELLI out of
doors, musing.*

Rondinelli. A gentle night, clothed with the moon and
silence.—

Blessed be God, who lets us see the stars ;
Who puts no black and sightless gulf between
Those golden gazers out of immensity,
And mortal eyes, yearning with hope and love !—
She's now a blessed spirit beyond those lights,
With happy eternal cheek. And yet, methinks,
Serious as well as sweet is bliss in heaven,
And permits pity for those that are left mourning.
Gentle is greatest and habitual nature !
Gentle the starry space ! gentle the air !
Gentle the softly ever-moving trees !

Gentle time past and future ! both asleep,
While the quick present is loud by daylight only.
And gently I come to nature, to be worthy
Of comfort and of her, and mix myself
With the everlasting mildness in which she lives.—
Sweetest and best ! my couch a widower seems,
Altho' it knew thee not ; and I came forth
To join thee as I could ; for thou and I
Are thus unhoused alike, and in no home.
The wide earth holds us both.

GINEVRA enters, and halts apart, looking at him.

Ginevra. Antonio !

Rondinelli. Oh earth and heaven ! What art thou ?

Ginevra. Fear not to look on me, Antonio !

I am Ginevra—buried, but not dead,
And have got forth and none will let me in.
Even my mother is frighten'd at my voice,
And I have wander'd to thy gentle doors.
Have pity on me, good Antonio,
And take me from the dreadful streets at night.

Rondinelli. Oh Heaven ! Oh all things terrible and
beautiful !

Art thou not angel, showing me some dread sight
Of trial and reproof ? Or art thou indeed
Still living, and may that hand be touch'd with mine ?

[She has held out her hand to him.]

Ginevra. Clasp it, and help me towards thy door ; for
wonder

And fear, and that long deadly swoon, have made
Me too a terror to myself, and scarcely
I know how I stand thus.

Rondinelli (moving slowly, but eagerly, and breathless towards her). Infold us, air !

Infold us, night and time, if it be vision !

If not—if not—

[*He touches her hand, and clasps her to his heart.*

It is Ginevra's self,

And in Antonio's arms !—She faints ! Oh sweetest !
Oh cheek, whose tears have been with mine—She'll die !—
She'll die, and I shall have kill'd her !

Ginevra (sliding down on her knees). Strength has risen
o'er me from the depths of weakness.

Oh Signor Rondinelli ! Oh good Antonio,
Be all I think thee, and think not ill of me,
Nor let me pass thy threshold, having a fear
Of the world's speech, to stain a spotless misery.

Rondinelli. Oh rise ; and when I think that thou canst
stand

Unhelp'd of these most glad but reverent arms,
Aloof will I wait from thee, as far apart
As now I closely grasp'd thee. I was mad,
And am, with joy, to find thee alive, and near me ;
But, oh blest creature ! Oh lady ! Antonio's angel !

Say but the word—do—and I love thee so,
That after thou hast tasted food and wine,
Myself will bear thee to thy house, thy husband,
Laying a heav'n on his repentant heart.

Ginevra. Never. The grave itself has been between us ;
The hand of heaven has parted us, acknowledged
By his own driving me from his shrieking doors :
And none but thy door, and a convent's now,
To which thy honourable haste will guide me,
Shall open to me in this world again.
Shelter me till the morn. Thou hast a mother ?

Rondinelli. Blessed be Heav'n, I have ;—a right good
mother—

Gentle, and strong, and pious. She will be yours,
So long as our poor walls boast of inclosing you,
And instantly. You scarcely shall have set
Your foot in the house, but with religious joy,
She will arise, and take you to her bed,
And make a child of you, lady, till you sleep.

Ginevra. Blessed be Heav'n indeed. I can walk strangely.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT V.

SCENE I.

A Room in the House of RONDINELLI, who enters.

Rondinelli. Five blessed days, and not a soul but we
Knows what this house in its rich bosom holds.
The man whom dear Diana bribed to secrecy
For our sakes, is now secret for his own ;
And here, our guest is taken for a kinswoman,
Fled from a wealthy but a hated suitor,
Out of no hatred, haply, to myself ;
For which, as well as for her own sweet sake,
The servants love her, and will keep her close.
She holds my mother's hand, and loves her eyes ;—
And yester evening she twice spake my name,
Meaning another's. Hence am I most proud,
Hence potent ; hence, such bliss it is to love
With smallest thought of being loved again,
That though I know not how this heav'n on earth
Can change to one still heavenlier, nor less holy,

I am caught up, like saints in ecstasies,
Above the ground ;—tread air ;—see not the streets
Through which I pass, for swiftness of delight,
And hugging to my secret heart one bosom.
I live, as though the earth held but two faces,
And mine perpetually look'd on hers.

Enter GIULIO.

How now, sweet Giulio? why so hush'd? our visitor
No longer sleeps by day. (*GIULIO kisses his hand*)

And why this style
Of pretty reverence and zeal, as though
You came betwixt myself and some new trouble?

Giulio. Nay, sir.

Rondinelli. You smile, to reassure me. Well;
Yet you breathe hard, and have been flying hither,
Your pretty plumage beaten with the wind,
And look as haggard pale, as when you brought
The daybreak to us from that cage, and found
Safe-housed our bird of paradise. What is it?

Giulio. I came, that Marco might not come. I thought,
Dear lord and master, Giulio's lips had best
Bring news of one whose face the servants know not,
Now in the hall, asking to speak with you.

Rondineli. What face?—Who is it?

Giulio. He saw me, and started;
And yet not angrily.

Rondinelli. Who saw? No kinsman
Of my dear mother's guest?

Giulio. No, sir; no *kinsman*.

Rondinelli. No officer from the court, or clergy?

Giulio. Neither.

Rondinelli. Our mutual friends are all, this instant,
with us,

Here, in the house. They, if they saw this man—
Say—would they know him?

Giulio. Surely, sir; none better,
Or with less willingness;—though five short days
Have bow'd him down, as with a score of years;
His eye that was so proud, now seems but stretch'd
With secret haste and sore anxiety;
And what he speaks, he seems yet not to think of.

Rondinelli. Come, let us speak his name, lest a mad
chance

That 'tis not he, make me repent the cowardice.
'Tis he? the man?

Giulio. The Signor Agolanti.

Rondinelli (*aside*). Life is struck black. Yet not so,
sweetest face,

Not so. He shall not hurt a hair of thy head,
While the earth holds us.—Guess you what he knows?

Giulio. All.

Rondinelli. How?

Giulio. I saw, coming from out his door,

The sexton's boy, his lowering front in smiles
For some triumphant craft; and not long afterwards
Came he, half staggering, shrouding with his cap
His haggard eyes. He bent his steps this way,
And I took wings before him, to give Marco
Speech for him should he come, and be his harbinger,
Sir, with yourself.

Rondinelli. Best boy! my friend, and brother!
But, Giulio, say you not a word elsewhere.
You understand me?

Giulio. Oh sir,—yes.

Rondinelli. Bid Marco
Conduct him hither.

Giulio. Geri and myself
May remain then? Not within hearing, sir,
But within call?

Rondinelli. Good lad! but there's no need.
See you, that not another eye in the house
Behold him coming.—Let him be shown up.

*[Exit GIULIO; and after a while, enter AGOLANTI,
looking round the room. They pause a little, and
regard one another.]*

Agolanti. You know why I am here?

Rondinelli. I do.

Agolanti. Five days—

(Aside) Rouse thee, Agolanti. Never shook'st thou yet

At living face :—what quail'd thee, coming hither ?

(To RONDINELLI.) Five days, and nothing told a husband ?

Rondinelli.

Nothing !

Agolanti. Nothing that he deem'd mortal.—But with
whom

Am I thus speaking ? With one honourable ?

One who though lawless in his wish, was held

Scrupulous in action ? of nice thought for others ?

Rondinelli. The angel who came hither, is angel still.

Agolanti. Signor Rondinelli, respect this grief.

It respects thee, if thou art still the man

I thought thee once. A graver faith than most,

And love most loving, if its truth were known,

Did, from excess of both—But what is past,

Is past ;—a gentleman is before me ;—his foe,

Or one he deem'd such, at a disadvantage ;

Illness, on all sides, gone ;—I am here ; am ready

To beg her pardon for that sore mistake,

Which for its very madness, friends, methinks,

Might haste to pardon ;—and so take her home.

Rondinelli. Your words are gentle, Signor Agolanti :—

I thank you ; and would to Heav'n, what must be borne,

Were always borne so well. The thing you speak of,

Seems easy, but in truth is not so.

Agolanti.

How ?

Rondinelli. A bar has risen.

Agolanti.

A bar !

Rondinelli. Which, to speak briefly,
Has render'd it not possible.

Agolanti. Not possible!
(*Aside.*) He said that she was "angel still."—(To *RONDINELLI.*) She still
Is living?

Rondinelli. Yes.

Agolanti. And here?

Rondinelli. She is so.

Agolanti. Able

To move? recover'd?

Rondinelli. She is still but weak,
Yet hourly gaining strength.

Agolanti. What hinders then—

You do not speak. Tell me, what strange prevention,
What inconceivable "bar," I think, you call'd it—

Rondinelli. Signor Francesco, I shall distress you
greatly;

And, for all sakes, as you will see too well,
Would to God any other man on earth
Had to make this disclosure.

Agolanti. In God's name then,
What is it?

Rondinelli. Her own consent would be required.

Agolanti. Well?

Rondinelli. And 'twould not be given.—She'll not return.

Agolanti. Will not return!—How "not return?" She's
well?

She's better—perhaps would wait some days—yes, yes—
Well, sir—when will she? I'll see her instantly,
And then we'll settle when. But you can tell me
At once.—Be pleased to say, sir, when you think
She'll come.

Rondinelli. 'Tis her own terrible word I speak, sir,
The night when she stood houseless at my door,
Dead to the past, alive to virtue only,
And honourable grief. She will return
Never.

Agolanti. Never return! Ginevra Agolanti
Never return? not come to her own house?
Impossible!—Witchcraft has been here! Seduction!
Where is she? Let me see her—instantly, sir!
Would you part man and wife?

Rondinelli. Alas! she holds them
Parted already, not by me.

Agolanti. A wife
Has but one home, sir.

Rondinelli. Sir, she thought so.

Agolanti. Sir, fever and delirium would not have
made
A friend unpardonable in my eyes
For having mis-beheld me.

Rondinelli. Surely, sir :—
Yet I conceive there is a difference.
But I am not the judge.

Agolanti. You are, sir ;—I fear
You are ;—I fear you have made yourself the judge, sir,
The criminal—the detainer. Why say nothing
Of her being here? Why let me find it out
From a gross boy, who has quarrell'd with his master,
And makes my shame his profit? Housed with thee too!

Rondinelli. Nay, in the melancholy convent housed,
Soon as its doors, now hung with flowers for Rome,
Be open to admit the appeals of sorrow!

Agolanti. Appeals of lies and crimes.—And so my wounds
Must be torn open afresh! hidden from none!
All eyes must stare upon me! I demand
To see my wife ;—the lady Agolanti:—
She is detain'd here. Horrible light begins
To dawn; there has been dreadful mockery—
Conspiracy! Worse! You have dishonour'd her.

Rondinelli. 'Tis false.—Be calm. Let both be calm,
nor startle
Feminine ears with words. Wait in this room,
Here, on the left, awhile ;—I'll bring herself
To look upon thy speech, if it so please her ;
If not, my mother, sir,—you have heard of her,—
From whom, so help me God, I never yet
Beheld her separate.

Agolanti. I demand—

Rondinelli.

This way.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

Another Room.

Enter RONDINELLI; and to him, from the opposite side, GIULIO with FIORDILISA, who kisses his hand.

Rondinelli. Sweet Fiordilisa, you attend your mistress Too closely. You grow pale.

Fiordilisa. 'Twas Giulio's paleness, sir, Struck me with mine.

Rondinelli. Fear not for him, or any one; You see me pale, yet see me smiling too: Now go, and with the like good flag advanced Of comfort beyond trouble, tell your lady I would entreat one word with her, alone.

Fiordilisa. I'll think, sir, trouble cannot come to stay Within so quiet and so bless'd a house; And so I'll try to look. [Exit FIORDILISA.]

Rondinelli (who has been writing something). And now you, Giulio, Go tell the friends who come to greet her rise From the sick bed, what shade has follow'd them. I fear, from some deep whispering on the stairs I caught but now, as we were coming up, They heard us wrangling. Say, all's quiet now—

They'll see me soon ; and give this to my mother.

[*Exit GIULIO with the paper ; and enter GINEVRA.*

My mother would have been before me, lady,
To beg an audience for her son ; but you,
Being still the final and sole arbitress
Of a new question, come with sudden face ;
It might befit you also, for more reasons
Than I may speak, to be its first sole hearer.

Ginevra. What is it ?

Rondinelli. Nothing that need bring those eyes
Out of the orbs of their sweet self-possession.
Your thoughts may stay within their heaven, and hear it.
'Twixt it and you, there is all heaven, and earth.

Ginevra. My story is known, ere I have reach'd the
convent ?

Rondinelli. Even so.

Ginevra. And somebody has come to claim me ?
From *him* ?

Rondinelli. Not *from* him.

Ginevra. From the church then ? No !
The state ?

Rondinelli. I said not *from* him. He is shaken
Far more than you should be, being what you are,
And all hearts loving you.

Ginevra. Himself !

Rondinelli. Himself.—

His haughty neck yet stooping with that night,
Which smote his hairs half grey. (*She weeps.*)

Ginevra (*aside*).

Alas !—yet more

Alas, that I should say it.—Not loud then?

Not angry?

Rondinelli. Only with your vows of refuge,
And those that stand betwixt his will and power ;
Else humble ; nay, in tears, and seeking pardon.
(*Aside.*) She's wrung to the core !—With grief is't? and
what grief?

Oh now, all riddles of the heart of love,
When 'twould at once be generous, yet most mean ;
All truth, yet craft ; a sacrifice, yet none ;
Risk all in foppery of supposed desert,
And then be ready in anguish to cry out
At being believed, and thought the love it is,
Martyr beyond all fires, renouncing heaven
By very reason that none can so have earn'd it ;—
Oh, if she pities him, and relents, and goes
Back to that house, let her yet weep for me !

Ginevra. When I said “ Never ” to that word “ return,”
He had not suffer'd thus ; had not shown sorrow ;
Was not bow'd down with a grey penitence.—
Sir—I would say, kind host—most kind of men—
My friend and my preserver—

Rondinelli.

Say no more,

So you think well of me.

Ginevra.

I could say on,

And twenty times as much, so you would think it
Best, some day hence.—Speak not.—

Rondinelli.

Yes, honour bids me;

Honour, above all doubts, even of poor self,
Whether to gain or lose ;—bids me say bravely,
Be wise, while generous—Guard the best one's peace,
Whoe'er that is ;—*her* peace—the rights of goodness
And vindication of the o'er-seeing heavens,
High above all wrong hearts,—his,—or mine own.

Ginevra. Although you call me “best,” who am not so,
I'll write that last and noblest admonition
Within the strongest memory of my soul,
For all our sakes. The way to him.

Rondinelli.

One word.

My mother—she—will see you again sometimes
In your lot's bettering from its former state,
As surely it must, your friends now knowing all,
He sad for all.

Ginevra. It is a help I look for.

Rondinelli. Her son forgive him that at this last
moment

He makes this first and only mention of him,
Since you vouchsafed to rest your troubles with us,—
His first—his last ;—may he too, as a friend,
Hope—that a thought of him—a passing memory—
Will sometimes mix with hers ?

Ginevra.

To think of her

Will be to think of both.

Rondinelli. Oh gentlest creature,
If what I am about to say to thee
Offend thee in the least, count it such madness
As innocence may pity ; and show no sign
Of thy displeasure. Be but mute ; and sorrow
With as mute thanks shall resume common words.
But if, in thy late knowledge of Antonio,
Thou hast seen nought, that under happier omens
And with all righteous sanction, might have hinder'd thee
From piecing out his nature's imperfections
With thy sweet thoughts and hourly confidence,
Reach him, oh reach, but for one blissful moment,
And to make patience beautiful for ever,
Thy most true woman's hand.

[She turns aside, and holds out to him her hand.

My heart would drink it.

[He strains it with both hands against his bosom.

Do thy worst, memory, now.—We have known each other
For twenty years in this. Your tears embolden you
Even to look at me through their glittering veil,
And set me some sweet miserable task :—
I understand ;—yes, we'll go quietly,
And you will let me keep this hand to the door ?
We will walk thus. This little walk contains
A life !—Might you say one word to me at parting ?

Ginevra. Antonio !—may your noble heart be happy.

*[She clasps her hands, and speaks with constant
vehemence, looking towards the audience.*

Alas ! alas ! Why was that one word utter'd
To bear down the last patience of my soul,
And make me cry aloud to Heaven and misery ?
I am most miserable. I am a creature
That now, for fifteen years, from childhood upwards,
Till this hard moment, when the heavens forbid it,
Have known not what it was to shed a tear,
Which others met with theirs. Therefore mine eyes
Did learn to hush themselves, and young, grow dry.
For my poor father knew not how I loved him,
Nor mother neither ; and my severe husband
Demanded love, not knowing lovingness.
And now I cry out, wishing to be right,
And being wrong ; and by the side of me
Weeps the best heart, which ought not so to weep,
And duty's self seems to turn round upon me,
And mock me ; by whose law nevertheless
Do I abide, and will I ; so pray Heaven
To keep me in my wits, and teach me better.
Turn me aside, sweet saints, and let me go.

[While RONDINELLI, who has fallen on his knee, is
stretching his hands towards her, the voices of
AGOLANTI, COLONNA, and DA RIVA, are
heard in violent quarrel*.

* The following words of the quarrel are supposed to be uttered during the most violent confusion, and partly at once :—

Agolanti. Who sent you here ? I never asked for you,
Nor you—

Colonna. And who for you ?

Ginevra. His voice ! In anger too ? Did you not say
That he was calm ? Heart-stricken ?

Rondinelli. He seem'd so.

Ginevra. Perhaps is so, and they mistake his sorrow.
There's mercy in it: for when danger comes,
Duty cries loudest. Ay, and here's the friend
Will not forsake me still, but bear me on,
Right where the trumpet of the angel calls.

[*He speeds her out.*]

SCENE THE LAST.

*Another Room in RONDINELLI'S House. AGOLANTI and
COLONNA, in loud dispute, with their Swords drawn,
DA RIVA interposing.*

Agolanti. I say —

Colonna. What say you then ?

Da Riva. Well, let him speak.

Agolanti. Who ?

Da Riva. Shut the door,

I say.

Colonna. Ay, who ? What idiot, or what brute
Could that be ?

Agolanti. Heaven itself, whom you blaspheme.
My voice shall reach it.

Da Riva. Door ! the door ! he has open'd it
On purpose ; see you not ? Follow him out.

Agolanti. I say, that nothing upon earth, no insolence—

Colonna. House-coward !

Da Riva.

Hush.

Agolanti.

Nor prudent friend—

Colonna.

Still, coward.

Agolanti. Nor talk of law, nor threats of church itself,
Shall move my foot one jot from where I stand,
Till she whom law, church, heaven and earth join'd to me,
Shall join me again, and quit this infamous house.

Da Riva. To be twice slain in thine ?

Colonna.

And twice thrust forth,

If she return to fright thee ?

Agolanti.

I've seen the page here ;

Seen you ; guess at your women ; and shall know
What hideous trap has steep'd her soul in blushes,
If she come not.

Colonna (*going to attack him*) Blush in thy grave to
say so.

*Enter RONDINELLI with GINEVRA, followed by his Mother,
OLIMPIA, DIANA, GIULIO, FIORDILISA, and Servants.*

Rondinelli. Forbear ! an angel comes. Take her, and
pray

Just Heaven to make her happy as thyself.

Colonna. Antonio, thou art damn'd to think it. See—

Da Riva. He shrinks from her again in very fear,
Which in his rage of vanity he'll avenge.

Agolanti. I hear not what they say, my poor Ginevra,
Thinking of thee alone.—Come, bear thee up,
And bravely,—as thou dost. We'll leave this place—
This way—So—so—

Da Riva. Antonio, will you let him?
Think of herself.—'Tis none of yours, this business,
But the whole earth's.

Rondinelli. She will not have me stay him—
I dare not—My own house too—See, she goes with him.

Da Riva. Call in the neighbours—

Colonna. Do, there's a right soul—
Tell all.

Agolanti She's with me still! She's mine! Who stays us.

Olimpia and *Diana.* Ginevra! sweetest friend!

Agolanti. Who triumphs now? Who laughs? Who
mocks at pandars,
Cowards, and shameless women?

Ginevra (*bursting away from him*). Loose me, and
hearken.

Madness will crush my senses in, or speak:—
The fire of the heavenward sense of my wrongs crowns me;
The voice of the patience of a life cries out of me;
Every thing warns me. I will *not* return.
I claim the judgment of most holy church.
I'll not go back to that unsacred house,
Where heavenly ties restrain not hellish discord,
Loveless, remorseless, never to be taught.

I came to meet with pity, and find shame;
Tears, and find triumph; peace, and a loud sword.
The convent walls — Bear me to those — In secret,
If it may be; if not, as loudly as strife,—
Drawing a wholesome tempest through the streets;
And there, as close as bonded hands may cling,
I'll hide, and pray for ever, to my grave.—
Come you, and you, and you, and help me walk.

Agolanti. Let her not stir. Nor dare to stir one soul,
Lest in the madness of my wrongs I smite ye.

Ginevra (to AGOLANTI). Look at me, and remember.

Think how oft

I've seen as sharp a point turn'd on thyself
To fright me; how, upon a weaker breast;
And what a world of shames unmasculine
These woman's cheeks would have to burn in telling.—
The white wrath festers in his face, and then
He's devilish.

Rondinelli. Will you let her fall? She swoons.

[*He catches her in his arms.*]

Agolanti (turning to kill him). Where'er she goes, she
shall not go there.

Colonna (intercepting him with his own sword). Dastard!
Strike at a man so pinion'd?

Agolanti. Die then for him. (*Strikes at COLONNA.*)

Diana and Olimpia. Help! Help!

[*The doors fly open, enter GIULIO followed by
Officer and Guard.*]

Giulio. 'Tis here! Part them, for mercy's sake.

Colonna. Die thou. (*He pierces him.*)

Da Riva. He's slain! What hast thou done?

Colonna.

The deed

Of his own will. One must have perish'd, sir (*to Officer*);

One, my dear friend (*to DA RIVA.*) Which was the
corse to be?

Da Riva (*looking at it*). There's not a heart here, but
will say, 'Twas he.

[*Curtain falls.*

THE END.

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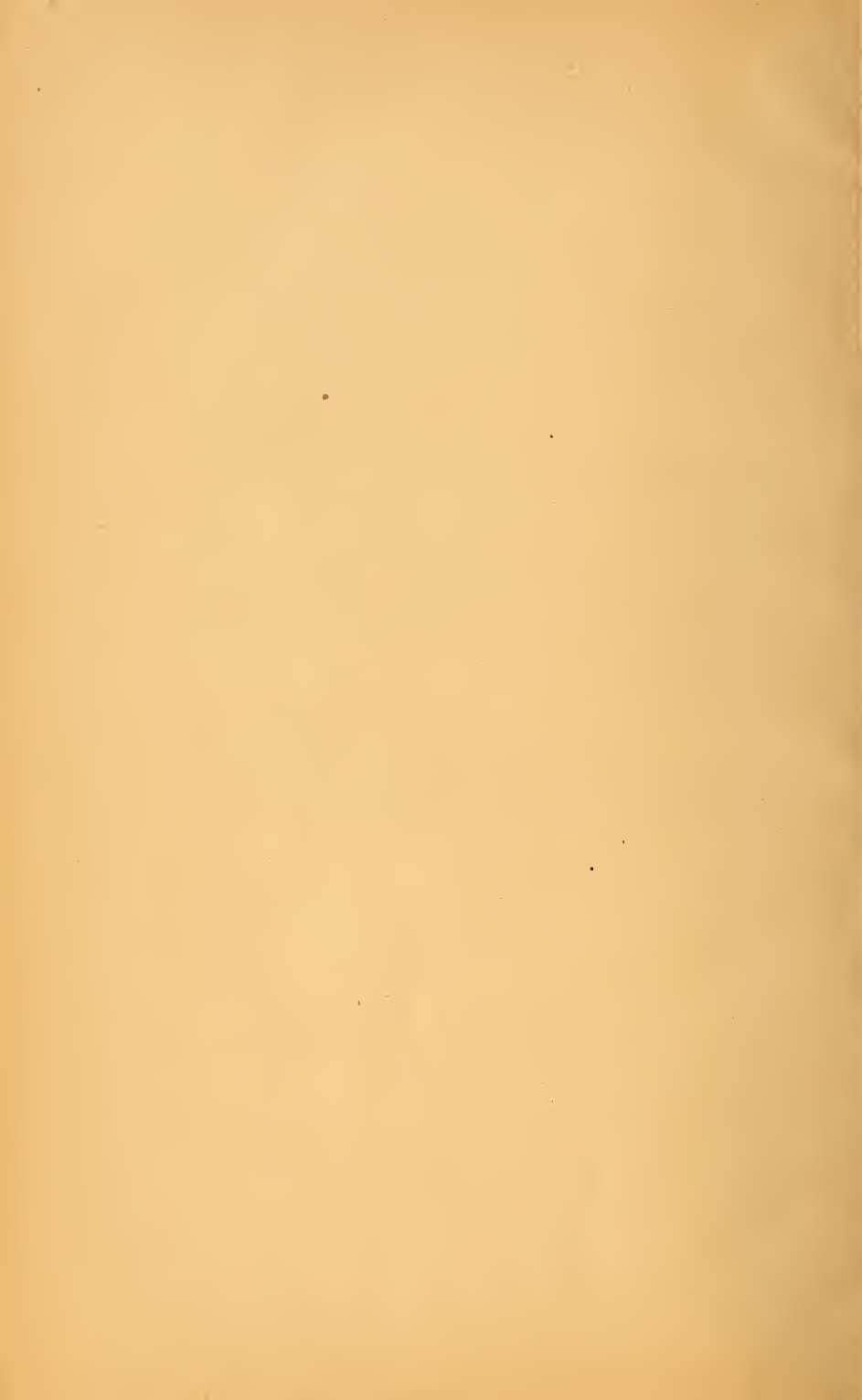
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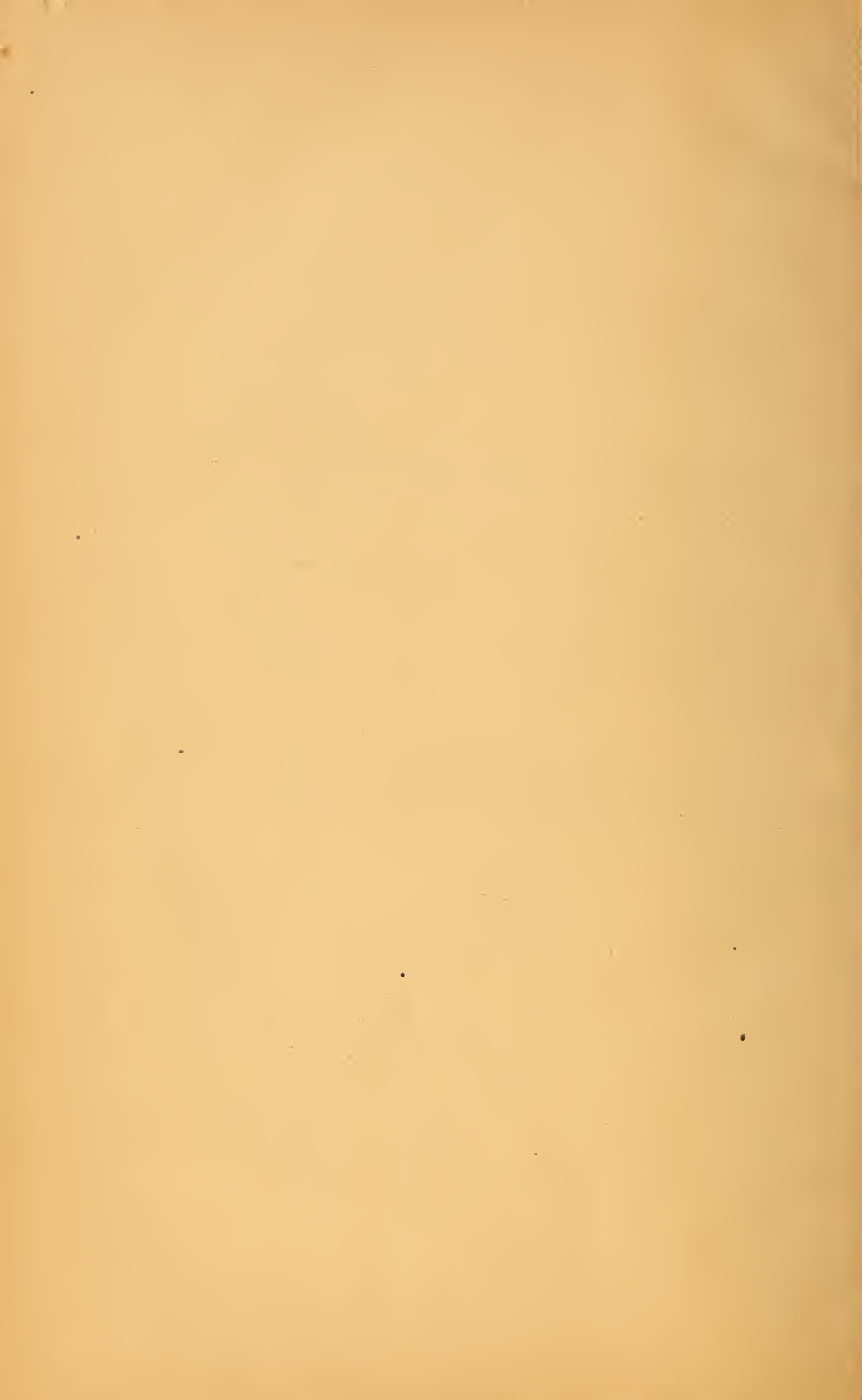
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